

# The American Academy of Neurology at 75

## Inclusivity and Evolution

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### Correspondence

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When Joseph A. Resch, a resident in the Neurology and Psychology Department at the University of Minnesota in 1946, complained to director Abraham B. Baker that he wanted to focus on practicing neurology but had no organization he could join to enhance his education, Baker began a challenging process of soliciting interest in a new association that would be more inclusive than the American Neurological Association's membership limited primarily to academic neurologists centered on the East Coast.

Launched with 50 members invited by Baker, the American Academy of Neurology (AAN) was incorporated on March 13, 1948. Today, the AAN represents more than 38,000 neurology professionals, from medical students and residents to clinicians, academics, and researchers—both US (29,500) and international (8,500). It includes 1,900 advanced practice providers and 280 business administrators, reflecting the AAN's support of neurology services in clinics, hospitals, and universities.

The first biannual National Meeting was held in June 1949 for nearly 200 attendees at a spa near French Lick, IN. The subsequent 1950 Regional Conference in Cincinnati was so successful that the plan to alternate national and regional meetings gave way to the burgeoning Annual Meeting that is held today. Peak attendance exceeded 15,000 in Philadelphia in 2019 before the coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic. Education has moved from classrooms into hallways and mezzanines for lively presentations and dialogs. Paper posters have been replaced by digital displays, and interactive programming invites questions on mobile devices. Prayer rooms and mothers/family rooms have been welcome additions.

Weekend Regional Conferences were established in 2002 to provide more continuing medical education opportunities to members unable to attend Annual Meetings. A Sports Concussion Conference was launched in 2014 for neurologists, athletic trainers, and coaches. In 2022, a groundbreaking Summer Conference: Autoimmune Neurology and Neurology Year in Review was well received.

In the 1970s, continuing education was provided through cassette tapes. Since 1993, the publication *Continuum: Lifelong Learning in Neurology*® has presented the highest quality in-depth information on topics in neurology, augmented by *Continuum*® Audio. Free e-learning options have expanded to prepare neurologists for Continuing Certification and to stay current on developments in diagnosis and treatment.

Today, 8 Leadership Programs help members develop skills to lead in their practices, institutions, or within the AAN. The Academy hosts summits with academic chairs and administrators to address unique problems they face and share AAN resources and support.

Founded in 1950, *Neurology*® published 6 issues annually before going monthly in 1953. Since 2007, it publishes weekly and offers a podcast. Newsworthy research papers are covered by scores of major media outlets. The *Neurology* suite of publications includes *Neurology*® *Clinical Practice* (2012), *Neurology*® *Neuroimmunology and Neuroinflammation* (2014), *Neurology*®

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Go to [Neurology.org/N](https://www.neurology.org/N) for full disclosures. Funding information and disclosures deemed relevant by the authors, if any, are provided at the end of the editorial.

*Genetics* (2015), and *Neurology*<sup>®</sup> *Education* (2022). *Neurology Today*<sup>®</sup> (2001) informs members of news in the profession.

Answering members' requests for patient education materials, *Brain & Life*<sup>®</sup> magazine debuted in 2005, complemented by a series of disease-specific books and a podcast in later years. Brain Health Fairs educated the public in Annual Meeting cities. In 2022, our inaugural Brain Health Summit brought visionary experts together to chart a course for public brain health across a lifetime.

The Academy's first award, named for S. Weir Mitchell, was presented by the AAN Women's Auxiliary in 1955. The auxiliary—a social/educational group for wives of the almost entirely male membership—no longer exists, but AAN awards are still highly valued, presented for achievements in science, education, patient safety, advocacy, and service. Younger members across the globe are recognized with awards and travel scholarships to Annual Meetings.

The arrival of Medicare in 1965 complicated the practice of medicine. The Academy began creating tools and resources to explain changes in coding and reimbursements. One member, Nelson G. Richards, MD, FAAN, volunteered countless hours to pull vital information together, including extracting all the neurology-related Current Procedural Terminology codes into a conveniently printed list. Richards became the first practicing neurologist elected president in 1983, and the post has included both practicing and academic neurologists ever since.

To demonstrate the value of neurology, the Axon Registry<sup>®</sup> was established in 2015 as a free member benefit to help small or solo practices and academic departments benchmark and improve services. AAN advocacy helped create the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke in 1950 and continues to rely on the passion of its members to join staff located in Washington, DC, and make their case to Congress through Neurology on the Hill and communications to lawmakers and regulators. BrainPAC, founded in 2007 as the only political action committee devoted to neurology, helps to provide the Academy access to lawmakers and informs them about our concerns.

Today, the AAN membership is 42% women. Yes, it took 55 years before Sandra F. Olson, MD, FAAN, became the first woman president (others had demurred, citing personal or professional obligations). But women have held other important positions, starting with Public Relations Committee member Mabel G. Masten, MD, in 1948, and *Neurology* Managing Editor Margaret Kane in 1949. Now, the *Neurology* journal Editorial Board is 50% women. Currently, 113 women serve on committees, representing 46% of participants, and 11 women serve on the 24-member Board of Directors.

Since the 1990s, the Academy has provided scholarships, awards, and exposure to neurology to medical students from underrepresented groups in medicine, with the objective of making neurology a more attractive career option. People of color are represented across the Board, committees, and editorial positions on our publications.

The AAN is firmly committed to embracing the diversity of our members, staff, organization, profession, and, ultimately, the patient communities we serve. It has instituted Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, Anti-Racism, and Social Justice across all areas of the Academy and has created an Antiracism Education Program and additional resources for members and staff.

In coming months, we will continue to celebrate the past, present, and future of the AAN in *Neurology* and our member magazine *AANnews*<sup>®</sup>. The world's largest professional association of neurologists has come a long way—and still has an exciting road ahead!

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